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**AN ALTERNATIVE U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY FOR AFRICA  
IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD**

by

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## **AN ALTERNATIVE U.S. MILITARY STRATEGY FOR AFRICA IN A POST-COLD WAR WORLD**

### **I. U.S. POLITICAL OBJECTIVES IN AFRICA--PAST, PRESENT, AND BEYOND THE 1990s**

Over the past 30 years, most U.S. policymakers have considered Africa as a pawn in the East-West chessboard. Dr. Henry Jackson, Professor of Political Science at Hunter College in New York City, reminds us that "...from the emergence of formerly colonized African territories to political independence in the 1960's, U.S. decision-makers usually perceived Africa as a mere appendage of America's global competition with the Soviet Union...". Henry Kissinger pronounced in 1976 that along with preventing foreign intervention and promoting cooperation among communities in southern Africa, the goal of the U.S. policy in that part of the world was "to prevent radicalization of Africa." Although President Carter disavowed the "characteristically Cold War posture" of Kissinger's "radicalization" doctrine, as Soviet interventions spiraled in the Horn of Africa and Cuban involvement in southern Africa became significant, Carter's Africa policy reverted to an East-West theme. U.S. policy has changed little until the recent breakthroughs in Namibia and South Africa; and above all with the "Coming of Gorbachev."

Basic to our Africa policy have been our strategic concerns and the degree of perceived threats to U.S. vital interests. These include: the vulnerability of Western shipping lanes in the Indian Ocean and around the Cape of Good Hope; access to strategic minerals; and facility of access to the Middle East oil reserves through the Horn of Africa.

Our political objectives have been:

- Promotion and preservation of political stability in the region;
- Promotion and preservation of stable economic institutions;

- Discouragement of the establishment of Soviet state-sponsored political hegemonies in the region;
- Encouragement of selected resistance movements that oppose regimes anathema to U.S. interests;
- Encourage and assist allies that share our objectives.

Other objectives have been the support of democratic governments in the region and condemnation of human rights abuses. (However, our geostrategic interests have often taken precedence over these last two objectives.) In general, peaks of concern and interest in Africa parallel threats of Soviet intrusions in the region and short-term crisis-oriented disaster relief events that attract U.S. humanitarian responses. As a result of inconsistent policies, U.S. economic development budgets and military assistance programs have steadily eroded.

Since there is evidence that in recent months Soviet policy towards Africa has shifted significantly, many U.S. Africa policymakers argue that the East-West chessboard perspective of U.S. political objectives needs to be reappraised. Indeed, in terms of global priorities the Soviets now insist that neither the USSR nor the U.S. have "vital" interests in Africa. Recent events may corroborate this--for example, the U.S. and the Soviet Union have encouraged, in some cases jointly, an end to civil wars they have financed in Africa: Soviet retreat military aid to Ethiopia; U.S. loss of interest in supporting the Barre government in Somalia. However, as outlined below, there are certain other factors which argue that the U.S. interests in Africa go beyond "vital strategic" motives.

Also, other "outside powers"--i.e., certain U.S. allies, continue to wield considerable influence in Africa. For example, France is a major foreign power in Africa. Indeed, Helen Kitchen of CSIS believes that the U.S. must establish overall guidelines on how and when to relate U.S. actions to the reality of French influence in Africa. She believes that any significant change in the French role would

necessitate a major re-evaluation of conflict potential in the two-thirds of the continent north of Zambia.

Lastly, in the past, U.S. policy objectives in Africa have been framed with the tacit support or the innocent indifference of the American people. (Note: As stated above, this disinterest/indifference rises and falls in direct proportion to humanitarian crises and/or perceived Soviet threats to the continent.) This process of African policy decision-making is often surprising to some Africa-watchers who note the persistent reluctance on the part of policymakers to acknowledge and include in the process the potential influence and growing concerns of 12 percent of the American citizens of African descent. It is further surprising that more creative use of this segment of the U.S. population is not recognized in terms of the positive impact they could have on U.S. policy in Africa. For example, Kitchen points out, "...Black Americans increasingly identify themselves with the commitment of their ethnic kin to bring an end to privileged white minority rule in South Africa." Similarly, a recent article in the Christian Science Monitor discussing the pros and cons of aid to Israel notes:

#### **TACKLING A TABOO TOPIC--SHOULD U.S. AID TO ISRAEL SHRINK?**

"...Israel is by far the wealthiest recipient of US aid and it gets by far the most. This imbalance was described as 'unfair, inequitable, and indefensible' in a circular letter from Rep. George Crockett Jr., a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, and nine House colleagues.

They noted that every Israeli gets \$700 per head, 'while every African would receive just a little more than \$1.' Seven hundred times more for Israeli Jews than for African blacks. They called for a 'major reassessment of our foreign aid programs.'"

--Thomas Stauffer  
Christian Science Monitor, 3/20/90

TransAfrica, the Black-led U.S. lobby for African and Caribbean issues, was instrumental in pressuring Congress to impose sanctions on South Africa. In its policy

paper, "United States Foreign Policy and the Black World," the organization theorizes that:

"...(t)here is... a dominant belief among policymakers that sub-Saharan Africa ranks at the bottom in terms of U.S. strategic interests. This view is uninformed and indefensible. Africa is perhaps the world's richest continent in terms of natural resources. The region's population also constitutes a huge potential market for American business. America will continue to need Africa's strategic assets--especially minerals--for the foreseeable future. In addition, Africa is the ancestral homeland of thirty million Black Americans who will increasingly question America's world role if Africa continues to receive inadequate attention and assistance...The blatant discrimination which characterizes U.S. development policy is not lost on the Africans...or on African-Americans and objective observers..."

Therefore, I propose that given the swiftly changing geopolitical events that have propelled a reevaluation of U.S. strategic objectives, our 1990s political objectives for Africa are in need of revision. This is based on (a) the diminution of US-Soviet tensions; (b) our allies' repositionings of their Third World interests; (c) U.S. domestic budgetary constraints; (d) increasing interests in our Africa policy by selected American pressure groups/lobbys.

The new policy changes should emphasize:

- Encouragement of peace and stability
- Promotion of economic and social development, where feasible within a free market context
- Encouragement of US-Soviet cooperation in promoting African economic/social progress
- Increased support from allies (including Japan, Korea, the EC)

- Active support of a larger UN/peacekeeping role in which the US still exercises a significant presence/interest.

## II. U.S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN AFRICA: PRESENT & FUTURE

U.S. military objectives in Africa have consistently reflected our concerns with Soviet intentions in the region. We have maintained military access or U.S. facilities in several African countries based on our strategic interests in the region and beyond--i.e., in Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf. Africa's strategic minerals and the sea lanes contiguous to its shores have been of vital concern to us.

The Soviet Union's actions in the region have been unpredictable and not very successful. They have sustained a costly civil war in Angola; supported a surprisingly unstable Marxist regime in Ethiopia. Its adventurism of the 1970s has given way to a subdued policy in the 1980s along with waning influence on states that were supportive in the past.

In reformulating our military objectives in Africa, we need to take a look at what Clausewitz terms the "center of gravity." The center of gravity for the Soviets--i.e., the ultimate source of its strength in Africa has been its ability to exploit the pervasive economic ills of the region that render its political institutions ripe for instability and communist ideology. By contrast, the U.S. center of gravity has been (a) the support/indifference of the American people and (b) the tendency of policymakers to view Africa in the context of an East-West rivalry. (Here we see the interrelated parts of the Clausewitz paradoxical trinity: the will of the people and the government interacting to motivate military strategy.)

While the U.S. has never used direct military force in sub-Saharan Africa, its support of surrogates has not been very successful in terms of bringing peace and economic advances to the region. For example, support of UNITA did not thwart Cuban military advances and successes in Angola; our well-intended economic and military assistance to countries like Zaire and Somalia have been disappointing. We

continue to be surprised by unexpected reverses as in the Horn of Africa. As Robert Rotberg points out, our history of picking ultimate victors in Africa has been limited. Rotberg recommends that the time is ripe to rethink our politico-military objectives:

"For eight years our regional initiatives in Africa have been hostage to global concerns. The Soviets have not been hindered by those anti-Soviet strategies. Yet our initiative in Africa and our relation with Africa have suffered as a result of linking our policies too tightly to an anti-Soviet crusade. Some of that same approach may continue to be necessary ...but we can do more for Africa and our interests by ...countering regional disadvantages that flow from a strict global interpretation."

R. Rotberg  
"Africa in the 1990s and Beyond"

A revised U.S. military objective for Africa would focus on:

- de-emphasizing Cold War politics
- maintaining friendly relations with African governments in order to (a) access key ports/air facilities; (b) access important defense related commodities;
- increased use of our Africa Civic Action and International Military Education and Training Program (IMET);
- de-emphasizing/eliminating arms sales to African governments
- including allies and the Soviet Union in cooperative development efforts.
- linking any and all aid/assistance programs to elimination of human rights abuses and institution of democratic reforms.

### **III. IMPLEMENTING U.S. MILITARY OBJECTIVES IN POST-COLD WAR AFRICA: CONSTRAINTS, CAPABILITIES, VULNERABILITIES**

A change in U.S. military objectives in Africa will not automatically facilitate a role of leadership and influence on the continent. While many African governments hold a natural empathy and openness towards America, ex-colonial partners such as France and Britain still command important positions of influence and prestige in the region. This does not mean that new U.S. military objectives cannot work.



Rather it suggests that our plans in the region should increasingly be coordinated with our allies, and we should not expect quick and easy results.

Undoubtedly, our allies have their own agenda in Africa. However, we must learn to use our important assets that Europeans do not possess--the input/support of 30 million Americans of African descent that should be called upon to influence African policy. In terms of program and policy support, a sound Africa policy based more on fundamental regards for growth and development, and not on East-West issues, can win wide support in this country from an interested pressure group. This element of the will of the people positively influencing U.S. strategic plans for Africa (in this case active involvement of the African-American community) can offset to a great extent challenges to our leadership in this part of the world that either our adversaries or allies would pose.

Our military role in Africa should also be linked closely to our development assistance project as well as those of our allies and international development agencies. The Africa Civic Action program fulfills the role of a new military strategy for Africa. Examples of USAID/Security Acceptance cooperation, through close planning with USAID, U.S. Civic Action personnel helped the Mauritanian armed forces complete a Bailey-type bridge in Mauritania at approximately half the original cost estimate. The Civic Action construction program was fused on to a USAID health and road access project.

In order to multiply Civic Action investments, U.S. projects should seek to work with European allies on development projects. For example, West Germany has provided technical assistance in Togo, where U.S. Civic Action provided equipment. A Belgian officer lent invaluable assistance in planning a clinic for Ruanda. In Malawi, the British help train Malawi engineers whom the U.S. is assisting in the construction of a clinic.

The vulnerabilities of such a dramatically different approach to military objectives relate to convincing a cost-conscious Congress of the validity and effectiveness of the policy; convincing U.S. economic and development bureaucracies to align with the military assistance community in implementing civic action/nation-building programs; gaining acceptance from African governments to abjure costly military arms programs in favor of military/civic action programs..

Past successes of Africa Civic Action programs attest to our capabilities and growing experience in implementing effective programs. The program has been extremely cost effective; concentrates on present-day African development problems and needs, and prepares a solid base for longer-term policies that preclude cold-war politics. It also subtracts Africa from costly, unproductive military-oriented politics.

#### **IV. A STRATEGIC MILITARY PLAN FOR POST-COLD WAR AFRICA**

The basic military strategic plan for Africa should rest on the Africa Civic Action projects as outlined in the DoD Civic Action Planning Guide.

##### **Objectives**

- Promote regional stability and economic development
- Improve the capability of African armed forces to plan and implement projects that benefit the civilian population
- Foster greater understanding between the military and civilian sectors in Africa
- Assist the nations in the region in protecting their natural resources
- Encourage the military to play a greater role in health care of its own troops and of the population at large

##### **Description**

The Africa Civic Action program has had a significant impact in providing African military establishments the means to engage in a broad range of nation-

building activities. The program is made up of three separate components: Military Civic Action, African Coastal Security, and Military Health Affairs.

The Military Civic Action program provides funding to involve and support host nation military establishments in infrastructure development projects which benefit the civilian sector. Projects include the construction of rudimentary bridges, small medical clinics and schools, the refurbishment of existing medical and educational facilities, the resurfacing of one rural airstrip and in a few cases, the provision of engineering equipment and related repair parts for use in civic action projects. The program contributes in important ways to the civilian sector and the economy while providing valuable training in infrastructure development to host nation militaries.

The Military Health Affairs program is intended to provide selected African militaries with minimum medical capabilities at low cost. The program provides limited quantities of medical equipment, supplies, and in-country medical advice and training to African military establishments.

#### Implementation

- Review the 22 countries where Africa Civic Action programs now exist; determine which projects should continue to be supported;
- Select countries that conform to criteria developed by State Department/DOD/USAID with consultations from the UN-Economic Commission for Africa and other UN development organizations;
- Coordinate Civic Action programs with IMET programs;
- consult with allies; EC organizations; Soviets on ways to cooperate on program;
- Present expanded program to Congress and to select special interest/lobby groups;
- Above all, consult with African governments before plan is expanded.

## **V. POTENTIAL RESULTS**

The Africa Civic Action program supports the U.S. objective of internal and regional stability by involving African militaries in nation-building. Projects respond to infrastructure and social needs. It is an alternative to providing lethal military equipment to African nations which lack a current external threat. The aims of the program are to encourage African nations to use a portion of their own national funds in civic action projects which contribute to national development.

In the past, the program has produced residual multilateral benefits: it has increased cooperation and coordination in the region with some of our NATO allies. For example, contacts established by HQ USEUCOM with the West German Ministry of Defense led to cooperation in projects in Ruanda and Niger. Future cooperative efforts with NATO allies are expected. To date, the program has been well received by African militaries. Civic Action projects transfer valuable management and technical skills in development programs to African militaries, building on the IMET program.

Stanley Schrager, in a review of strategic planning for Africa, argues that there is a way to bridge the gap between economic and security assistance. He calls it "The Third Choice" --civic action for Africa. He feels that civic action offers Africa political stability, and economic development--one less susceptible to outside pressures. Civic action programs can involve both the Soviet Union and the United States. It is definitely a program whose time has come and serves as a viable military assistance alternative to Cold War politics in Africa.

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